

National Grange

Of THE ORDER Of PATRONS Of HUSBANDRY

A New Century - A New Grange



February 5, 2003

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW, CY-B402
Washington, DC 20554

Re: WC Docket No.: 03-16

Application by SBC, SBC Ameritech and/or Michigan Bell Telephone Company for Authorization Under Section 271 of the Communications Act To Provide In-Region, InterLATA Services in the State of Michigan

Dear Ms. Dortch:

On behalf of the 300,000 members of the National Grange, the nation's oldest general farm and rural public interest organization, I am pleased to submit the following comments in support of SBC's application to provide in-region, interlata services in Michigan. The National Grange firmly believes that increased competition in the long distance market is essential for the rollout of necessary and advanced telecommunications services that will benefit rural communities in Michigan.

A majority of our Michigan State Grange members reside in rural areas of Michigan. For our members, basic telecommunications services are vital to their daily lives. In many Michigan rural communities, essential communications for rural residents are only available through the use of toll and long distance calls. This places an extra financial burden on rural Americans who live in remote geographic areas. Rural Americans often depend on long distance telephone service to maintain contact with family members and friends, as well as gain access to necessary public and commercial services such as law enforcement, local government, hospitals, attorneys and doctor's office. However, most rural areas are currently served by a single service provider. SBC's entry as a large and new competitor would help drive down the basic rates that rural consumers would have to pay for long distance service.

More than 2 million people live in the rural areas of Michigan. SBC's entry into the long distance markets in Michigan will help spur an investment in broadband deployment that would allow families in rural communities to receive the same technological opportunities as their urban counterparts. Provider choice and lower-cost access to the Internet over basic phone lines is important to the future of rural America. Rural consumers in Michigan often have to use long distance to access the Internet, thus incurring both Internet Service Provider (ISP) and long

distance charges. Access to the Internet and other advanced technologies can expand life-long learning opportunities, increase the quality of health care, enhance public safety, promote more efficient and environmentally friendly farm technology and make services more affordable to rural communities in Michigan.

We believe the application by SBC to provide long distance service in Michigan will serve the interest of rural consumers. The National Grange looks forward to the FCC's approval of this application so consumers and rural populations in Michigan can enjoy the benefits of a more robust and competitive telecommunications market.

Sincerely,

Leroy Watson

Leroy Watson, Legislative Director

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